CLAIMS

1. (Currently Amended) A method comprising:

creating, by a pixel array generator, an emoticon pixel set by a sender by selecting a single set of pixels to be used as the emoticon pixel set;

storing the emoticon pixel set in a custom emoticon object store;

assigning a character sequence to the emoticon pixel set ~~pixels~~ by the sender using a keyboard device, the character sequence representing the emoticon pixel set;

transmitting a text message including the character sequence to a destination to allow for reconstruction of the emoticon pixel set~~pixels~~ at the destination, wherein both of the text message and the emoticon pixel set are displayed on a screen of the destination, the emoticon pixel set ~~is to be~~being substituted at the destination within the text message for the character sequence within the text message ~~and both of text message and the emoticon are displayed on a screen~~; and

establishing a real-time peer-to-peer link between the sender and the destination to retrieve the pixels from a storage medium associated with the sender.

2. (Previously Presented) The method as recited in claim 1, wherein the character sequence has characters less than or equal to seven.

3. (Currently Amended) The method as recited in claim 1, wherein the ~~pixels~~pixel emoticon set comprise a 19 x 19 pixel grid.

4. (Currently Amended) The method as recited in claim 1, wherein the character sequence allows real-time mapping to the ~~pixels~~pixel emoticon set.

5. (Currently Amended) The method as recited in claim 1, further comprising parsing the character sequence into an object name for the ~~pixels~~pixel emoticon set, wherein the object name includes an identifier of the ~~pixels~~pixel emoticon set and a location of the ~~pixels~~pixel emoticon set.

6. (Currently Amended) The method as recited in claim 1, further comprising transmitting the character sequence in a real-time first communication; and

transmitting data representing the ~~pixels~~pixel emoticon set in a second communication, wherein the data reconstructs the ~~pixels~~pixel emoticon set in place of the character sequence in the real-time first communication.

7. (Original) The method as recited in claim 6, wherein the data comprises a portable network graphics file.

8. (Currently Amended) The method as recited in claim 1, further comprising:

parsing the character sequence into an identifier and a location of the ~~pixels~~pixel emoticon set; and

storing the identifier and the location in a header of a message that includes the character sequence.

9. (Currently Amended) The method as recited in claim 8, wherein the identifier and the location comprise at least parts of an object name for the ~~pixels~~pixel emoticon set.

10. (Original) The method as recited in claim 9, wherein the object name is stored in a header of the message.

11. (Original) The method as recited in claim 1, wherein the transmitting uses at least one of an object store and an object transport mechanism.

12. (Original) The method as recited in claim 1, wherein the transmitting comprises instant messaging.

13. (Currently Amended) The method as recited in claim 12, wherein the instant messaging has a limited data capacity that excludes including data representing the ~~pixels~~pixel emoticon set in a single instant message that also includes data representing a threshold amount of text.

14. (Previously Presented) A method, comprising:

receiving a communication by a message receiver, wherein the communication includes a character sequence in a text message, wherein the character sequence is mappable to a single set of pixel array residing outside the communication;

retrieving the pixel array using the character sequence;

replacing the character sequence within the text message in the communication with the pixel array; and

displaying the pixel array and the text message in a screen.

15. (Original) The method as recited in claim 14, wherein the communication includes a header storing at least one of an identifier of the pixel array and a location of the pixel array.

16. (Original) The method as recited in claim 14, wherein the identifier and the location comprise at least part of an object name for the pixel array.

17. (Original) The method as recited in claim 14, wherein the retrieving further includes mapping to a local storage medium to determine if the pixel array has been previously stored in the local storage medium.

18. (Original) The method as recited in claim 17, wherein the local storage medium comprises a cache of temporary files used by a web browser.

19. **(Original)** The method as recited in claim 14, wherein the retrieving further includes:

checking for the pixel array on a local storage medium;

if the pixel array is not located in the local storage medium, then attempting to establish a direct link with a sender of the communication to retrieve the pixel array from a storage medium associated with the sender; and

if a direct link to the sender cannot be established, then retrieving the pixel array through a server between the sender of the communication and the recipient of the communication.

20. **(Original)** The method as recited in claim 19, wherein the direct link comprises a peer-to-peer connection using one of a transmission control protocol or a user datagram protocol.

21. **(Previously Presented)** A system, comprising:

a means for performing real-time communication between a first computing client and a second computing client;

a means for sending, by a message transmitter, a real-time first communication that includes a character sequence representing the graphics data of an emoticon represented by a single set of pixels;

a means for sending the graphics data of the emoticon in a second communication from the first communication;

a means for replacing the character sequence in the real-time first communication with the graphics data from the second communication; and

a display device for displaying the graphic data in the first communication.

22. **(Original)** The system as recited in claim 21, further comprising a means for adapting images of various sizes and formats to a pixel array format of predetermined size for use as the graphics data of emoticons.

23. **(Currently Amended)** A custom emoticon engine having at least a physical component in a computing device, the custom emoticon engine comprising:

an image selector to create an emoticon from an image, wherein the emoticon is representable as a single set of pixels;

a custom emoticon object store to store the emoticon;

a character sequence assignor to associate a sequence of characters input by a keyboard device with the pixels; and

a transmitter to send the character sequence in a text message to a destination, wherein the pixels replace the character sequence within the text message at the destination and both ~~of text~~of the text message and the pixels are displayed in a screen.

24. **(Original)** The custom emoticon engine, as recited in claim 23, further comprising a user interface wherein a first dialogue is deployed to define custom emoticons and a second dialogue is deployed to create real-time messages to include the character sequences associated with the custom emoticons.

25. **(Original)** The custom emoticon engine, as recited in claim 23, further comprising a custom emoticons object store to transfer data of custom emoticons separately from the real-time messages that include the character sequences.

26. **(Original)** The custom emoticon engine, as recited in claim 23, further comprising a character sequence parser, wherein each character sequence is parsed into an object name usable as an emoticon identifier and an emoticon locator.

27. **(Original)** The custom emoticon engine as recited in claim 26, further comprising a header engine to store an object name in a header of a real-time message.

28. **(Original)** The custom emoticon engine as recited in claim 26, wherein the custom emoticon engine uses an object store mechanism.

29. **(Original)** The custom emoticon engine as recited in claim 26, wherein the custom emoticon engine uses an object transport mechanism.

30. (Currently Amended) A computer readable storage medium containing instructions that are executable by a computer to perform actions comprising:

creating an emoticon by selecting an image associated with the emoticon by a sender;

representing the image as single set of pixels for the emoticon;

assigning a character sequence to the emoticon, wherein the character sequence is assignable by the sender; and

transmitting a text message by the sender along with the character sequence to a destination to allow for reconstruction of the emoticon at the destination, wherein the emoticon is ~~to be~~ substituted within the text message for the character sequence within the text message, and both the text message and the emoticon are to be received in the same dialog.

31. (Previously Presented) The computer readable storage medium as recited in claim 30, wherein the character sequence allows real-time mapping to the emoticon.

32. (Previously Presented) The computer readable storage medium as recited in claim 30, further comprising instructions to parse the character sequence into an object name for the emoticon, wherein the object name includes an identifier of the emoticon and a location of the emoticon.

33. **(Previously Presented)** The computer readable storage medium as recited in claim 30, further comprising instructions to:

transmit the character sequence in a real-time first communication; and

transmit data representing the emoticon in a second communication, wherein the data is used to reconstruct the emoticon in place of the character sequence in the real-time first communication.

34. **(Previously Presented)** The computer readable storage medium as recited in claim 30, further comprising instructions to:

parse the character sequence into an identifier and a location of the emoticon; and

store the identifier and the location in a header of a message that includes the character sequence.

35. **(Previously Presented)** The computer readable storage medium as recited in claim 30, further comprising instructions to retrieve the emoticon.

36. **(Previously Presented)** The computer readable storage medium as recited in claim 35, further comprising instructions to retrieve the emoticon using one of an object store mechanism and an object transport mechanism.

37. **(New)** A method for facilitating communication using custom emoticons, the method comprising:

creating, by a pixel array generator, an emoticon pixel set by a sender by selecting a single set of pixels, which is a custom emoticon;

storing the emoticon pixel set in a custom emoticon object store of the sender;

transferring the emoticon pixel set to a destination from the custom emoticon object store of the sender, wherein the transferring comprises establishing a real-time peer-to-peer link between the sender and the destination to retrieve the emoticon pixel set from the custom emoticon object store of the sender;

sending instructions to the destination on how to retrieve the emoticon pixel set;

mapping the character sequence to the emoticon pixel set using a keyboard device;

parsing the character sequence into an object name for the pixel emoticon set, wherein the object name includes both an identifier and a location of the pixel emoticon set;

storing the identifier and the location in a header of a text message;

transmitting, to the destination, the text message by a sender, the text message including the character sequence, which was mapped to the pixel emoticon set, the destination being configured to identify and locate the transferred emoticon pixel set at the destination using the identifier and the location transmitted in the header of the text message, wherein both of the text message and the emoticon pixel set are displayed on a screen of the destination, the emoticon pixel set being substituted at the destination within the text message for the character sequence mapped to the emoticon pixel set

within the text message, the emoticon pixel set being transferred from the sender to the destination separately from the transmission of the text message from the sender to the destination.

38. (New) A method for facilitating communication using custom emoticons, the method comprising:

receiving a communication by a message receiver, wherein the communication comprises:

a text message, the text message including a custom-emoticon-mapped character sequence, which is mapped to custom emoticon pixel set, which is defined set of pixels a residing outside the communication; and

a header storing at least one of an identifier and a location of the custom emoticon pixel set, the identifier and the location comprising at least part of an object name for the custom emoticon pixel set;

determining whether the custom emoticon pixel set is stored in a local storage medium of the message receiver, wherein the determining utilizes the identifier and the location;

in response to the determining, retrieving the custom emoticon pixel set from the local storage medium of the message receiver;

otherwise, retrieving the custom emoticon pixel set from a storage medium associated with the sender of the communication or with a server, in which the communication did not originate;

displaying the text message in a screen, the custom emoticon pixel set being displayed instead of and in place of the custom-emoticon-mapped character sequence in the text message.